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Ontario

Margaret Birch
Provincial Secretary for
Social Development
William Davis, Premier



DEPOSITOR

Momentum

PUBLISHED FOR
BY THE PR

IYDP is Underway!

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons as a means of promoting the enjoyment, by disabled persons, of all rights and opportunities available in society, and encouraging their full and equal participation at all levels of community life. As part of our continuing efforts to support these goals, and to play an active part in communicating IYDP objectives, the Provincial Secretariat for Social Development offers you the first edition of our quarterly publication — *Momentum*.

Designed primarily as a vehicle for information about IYDP-related programs and activities



Premier Davis gets a helping hand in raising the official IYDP

frustrations disabled people face daily in their efforts to lead

Momentum extension to its readers



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Volume I
Spring 1981



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Momentum

PUBLISHED FOR THE INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DISABLED PERSONS
BY THE PROVINCIAL SECRETARIAT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

IYDP is Underway!

The United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons as a means of promoting the enjoyment, by disabled persons, of all rights and opportunities available in society, and encouraging their full and equal participation at all levels of community life. As part of our continuing efforts to support these goals, and to play an active part in communicating IYDP objectives, the Provincial Secretariat for Social Development offers you the first edition of our quarterly publication—*Momentum*.

Designed primarily as a vehicle for information about IYDP-related programs and activities underway throughout the province, *Momentum* will act as a catalyst to discussion, a medium for dialogue, and as a voice for the more than 800,000 Ontario citizens who are in some way disabled. In our efforts to dispel many of the myths surrounding their abilities or disabilities, we hope to communicate the tremendous untapped potential of this important segment of the community, and to help eliminate many of the unnecessary



Premier Davis gets a helping hand in raising the official IYDP flag.

frustrations disabled people face daily in their efforts to lead ordinary lives.

Each edition will highlight the conferences, seminars, workshops and other IYDP-related events that are planned and in progress throughout Ontario. *Momentum* will also provide a platform for interaction and exchange of ideas and queries between disabled people and interested publics, employers, agencies and government.

"Full participation and equality" is the U.N. theme for 1981.

Momentum extends an invitation to its readers to become involved in making the objectives of the year a reality. By encouraging the integration of disabled people into the mainstream of community life, by improving awareness and understanding of their needs and fundamental rights in the world, life will be made richer for us all. It's essential that we get involved, as individuals, and as influential members of the community. We think *Momentum* is a great way to get us going.

1981—A Special Year

There are many things people would like to see accomplished in this special year. For disabled people, some of the issues center on accessibility to housing, employment, transportation and recreation. Programs and services in both the public and private sectors do deal with these tangible issues.

Less tangible, but more pervasive is the issue of attitudes. I talked with many disabled people in the months before 1981. Each one said to me that the most significant and lasting contribution of IYDP will be a change in attitudes—a change that enables them to see themselves, and others to see them, as people with abilities, rather than disabilities.

The Oxford dictionary defines special as, "for a particular purpose". The United Nations describes the purpose of International Year of Disabled Persons in its theme, "Full participation and equality".

Initiatives

"Keeping on the move"

"If it weren't for parallel transit, I'd be sitting at home collecting a pension", says Don Burnett of Ottawa, who works as a personnel clerk at the Federal Department of Agriculture.

Parallel transit, or paratransit, is a system designed to provide disabled people with transport services available to the able-bodied. Being able to get about is crucial to that sense of independence disabled people feel is vital to their full acceptance in a highly mobile society. It can make the difference between having and not having a decent job, seeing friends, shopping, going to movies and social events.

Don Burnett, who has muscular dystrophy, now owns his

own van equipped to enable him to drive himself. Burnett says it was paratransit which enabled him to get a university education and a steady job, which eventually led to owning his own van.

In Ontario, the organization of parallel transit systems is in transition. In July 1979, the province introduced a 50% grant to any municipality which wishes to set up a system; so far 34 of Ontario's 60 transit authorities have done so. There are many variations, ranging from private volunteer services to fully-organized schedules.

Ideally, disabled passengers should be picked up at their doors and taken wherever they might wish to go. These special-

ized vehicles should charge no more than any other form of public transit. They should give the same range and flexibility of service.

Last year, Ontario's Ministry of Transportation and Communications found itself with a surplus of unspent subsidies allocated for parallel transit for disabled people. One of the Ministry's priorities for IYDP is to urge more communities to complete their plans for paratransit. Sarnia, for example, began its service on February 15th of this year. Timmins is now petitioning its city council for service.

Ottawa's system is, in the words of one March of Dimes official, "one of the best in



It is clear that this purpose will only be achieved when attitudes change.

In 1981, each and every one of us can make a contribution that will make the year truly special, by making it possible for the U.N. goal to be a reality for all citizens.

Sincerely,

Margaret Birch

Margaret Birch,
Provincial Secretary

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Initiatives

Canada". It employs a computerized routing coordination to provide a door-to-door service. This system logs more trips per month than any other city system in the country.

In London, Ontario, because of paratransit, a hospital and a nursing home have created day clinics for their disabled patients who can now come for treatments by van.

Following suit, Parkwoods Chronic Care Hospital opened a Day Hospital program three months after paratransit was introduced in London. Bernice Clifford explains that the hospital is encouraging people to stay at home, only coming into the hospital for treatment. Paratransit makes this possible.

"It's been absolutely tremendous", says John Morin, a London community organizer who has spinabifida. "There's an awful lot more programming for disabled people in London now than there used to be".

Thunder Bay is a fairly typical example of the evolutionary steps towards paratransit over the last decade, but with a unique twist at the end. The service began with a Local Initiatives Program grant, together with donations in the early 70's. Finding they had tapped into a real community need, funding was taken on by the municipality when LIP grants expired. However, when provincial funding began, the contract was awarded to Thunder Bay Action Group, Inc., a service organization controlled and run by disabled persons.

"We can and do create a better service", says Allan Buchan. "We can identify needs". Allan is the operation's manager for Thunder Bay's paratransit service. He has cerebral palsy and he requires a wheelchair for getting around on his own. As such, he understands the benefits of paratransit

for increasing the independence of others who also have his need.

Thunder Bay has an advisory council on paratransit made up of agency representatives, passengers and the municipal transit. "We reciprocate", says Buchan. "I also sit on municipal transit operating committees".

Buchan says that provincial funding has allowed the paratransit system to be expanded. Now 18% of funds come from the municipality, 50% from the

submission to city council proposing a municipally operated service controlled by a board which would include disabled consumers of the service.

Sudbury is likewise undergoing transition. The city currently has one van, called the Sunshine Bus, a service started by a local doctor.

Sudbury Coalition Ability Council is working with Sudbury Transit to create a new larger service to fill in the gaps left by the existing service.



Thunder Bay Action Group is busy planning the new transit system for physically disabled citizens.

province and the balance, about 32%, from the users. They pay 75¢ per ride although the actual cost is an average of \$6.14 per trip. This is comparable to regular transit.

By contrast, Timmins is one of a number of communities which has not yet taken advantage of provincial funding. Timmins has a single van operated as a special service by a nursing home, available on weekdays and from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm.

A concerned group of disabled people has prepared a

Seven of the ten directors of SCAC are themselves disabled. "It used to be that social agencies would speak on behalf of disabled people", says Debbie Love of the Sudbury March of Dimes. Now this is no longer the case. The March of Dimes recognizes their ability to speak for themselves. "They're better qualified; better qualified than I am, for instance".

This spirit reflects the desire of disabled persons not to be patronized.

Toronto is the focus of an ongoing controversy over

whether or not there should be partial integration of transit for disabled persons within regular transit services.

Jerry Lucas, speaking for the Ontario Federation for the Physically Handicapped, says integration of disabled people within subway systems in San Francisco and Washington and light rail in Edmonton have been most successful and recommends this type of system for Toronto.

"We're advocating wheelchairs on public transit", he says. "We've been advocating this for years."

Therefore, accessibility should be built into each new public facility as it is created, Lucas says, such as the Spadina subway and the Scarborough LRT systems, in Toronto, and amortize the cost over the next 50 years.

"People in a wheelchair will still be going from here to there 50 years from now", he says.

Rie Kidman of the Ministry of Transportation and Communications acknowledges the controversy, but believes Toronto is now on the right track. "About Ontario's parallel system in general, Kidman says, "It's worked out very well".

The next step will be to make one system accessible to the registered users of another system within each city. A spokesman for MTC says this is in the works for this IYDP year. Meanwhile, Ottawa has gone ahead with this next step, by allowing anyone in a wheelchair access to the system. As Don Burnett says, "They won't turn down anyone in a wheelchair".

The central goal of each of these parallel transit systems is one of increasing the independence of physically disabled people; a goal that is obviously being met now, or will be in the near future.

"Access U of T makes the Inaccessible Accessible!"

In the fall of 1980, a group of students, staff and faculty—disabled and able-bodied—formed a campus organization titled, "Access U of T". At the same time, the University of Toronto appointed a Coordinator of Services to Disabled Persons for ten months, on a part-time basis. The purpose of these actions is to make the campus accessible to disabled people in terms of buildings and facilities as well as programs and employment.

The eagerness of student volunteers to assist in any way they can has been terrific. These volunteers read for blind students, take notes for the hard-of-hearing, go to the library with people who have difficulty getting about the stacks, help people in wheelchairs up the many stairways and through the endless doors on campus. The true benefits of this program can only be realized when you are aware of the university's lack of accessibility. As "The Varsity" the student newspaper, explains: "The U of T has not been one of



U of T campus strives for accessibility

the most hospitable academic institutions in Canada as far as handicapped persons are concerned. Many of the buildings are inaccessible and special services have been insufficient".

Access U of T is an attempt to identify problems and suggest solutions. The Coordinator, working with "Access U of T" has

published a payroll insert for all U of T employees on "Hints to help you relate to disabled persons in the University community". The Student Administrative Council (SAC) has put out a flyer entitled, "Students Helping Students".

In addition, "Awareness Days" were held on campus in February in which displays, information booths, videotapes and films were used to raise the consciousness of the able-bodied student and faculty member about his disabled fellows.

The Coordinator of Services to Disabled Persons is Eileen Barbeau. In her crowded office at the International Student Centre, she has one assistant, provided by OCAP on a temporary basis. "The University is a microcosm of society", she says. "We must make the IYDP motto, 'Equality and Full Participation', a reality on campus".

The University has introduced an official policy to make major buildings accessible to disabled people over the next

ten years. But there are still many holes in the system of facilities and aid available.

For example, most books on tape for the blind are recreational, not educational, and hearing impaired students who need "signing"—sign language instruction—have to go to the U.S. to study because this facility is not available to them in Canada. In addition, there is no special allocation of university funds specifically for the blind student; the only audio library is at Trent University in Peterborough. Nor is there an up-to-date guide to the physical access of the campus for the disabled students.

The Coordinator has initiated a system of card indexes for disabled applicants to the University. This establishes a liaison with academic and administrative departments so that disabled students can find out what is available to them in each faculty. This could ease the problems of integration considerably for the prospective disabled student.

Deaf/Blind people can communicate

Services are being expanded this year for both the deaf-blind and the profoundly deaf with funding from the Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services.

One of these programs, with the assistance of the CNIB, will train intervenors for people who are both deaf and blind. An intervenor communicates with a deaf-blind person by touch, spelling out the message on the palm of the hand. By acting as a communication link, the intervenor makes it possible for deaf-blind people to deal with everyday living as independently as possible.

Joan MacTavish of the CNIB says 170 adults and 70 children in the province have been identified as requiring this service, but there may be as many as 600 in the province.

Another program, being developed with the Canadian Hear-

ing Society will provide sign language interpreter services for the approximately 13,000 profoundly deaf people in the province. Judy Rebick reports that a governing council partly made up of deaf people is being set up to run the service. Twelve interpreters are being hired under the program to be located across the province to offer their services free of charge on call as needed.

"Except in Toronto, there are no full time sign language interpreters available on call in the province", says Mrs. Rebick.

"In order that deaf people can participate in society in every way, interpreters are essential." The first new appointments will be to Windsor, Hamilton, London and Thunder Bay.

The new services, starting this year, will continue after the International Year of Disabled Persons.

"This is The Year!"

The International Year of Disabled Persons came into being by a United Nations Resolution. In Canada, there is a Canadian Organization Committee coordinating activities at the federal level and each provincial government has made a commitment to the year.

In Ontario, there is both an inter-ministerial committee and also a non-governmental committee.

Some 18 ministries plus the Civil Service Commission and the Workmen's Compensation Board have representatives on the provincial inter-ministerial committee which is coordinating efforts within the government structure. Among other projects, they are working to make government more accessible and seeking ways to hire more disabled people into government service.

The government has also indicated that an amount of \$12 million in addition to what is already being spent on programs and services for disabled people has been set aside this year for new and expanded IYDP-related programs. The first announcement related to this special funding was for \$400,000 to train intervenors for people who are both blind and deaf, and sign language interpreters for the profoundly deaf. (See separate story elsewhere in this issue.) These will be permanent additions to services currently in operation in the province.

The non-governmental committee, called the 1981 Coordinating Committee, is made up of about 30 agencies and consumer groups. The Coordinating Committee has received a \$375,000 Wintario grant to offer staff resources and information packages to local groups during the year.

In addition, many Ontario organizations have their own special projects. The Ontario March of Dimes, for example, has 35 disabled people visiting

schools to enable students to gain a better understanding of life with a disability.

Within municipalities, at least 30 community groups have been formed and more are in the planning stages.

Some are Mayors' Task Forces appointed by city councils as in the case of Windsor and Oshawa, whereas some of the communities have committees formed by local social service agencies.

In some areas, such as Belleville, organization has come from disabled persons themselves. Then there are those cities, like Metro Toronto and Thunder Bay, with existing umbrella organizations for disabled persons.

The efforts at the community level are varied. Oshawa is undertaking a thorough review of services in the city as they apply to disabled persons. Hamilton-Wentworth has begun an award program for distinguished services to disabled persons. Ottawa is awarding scholarships to disabled students. Scarborough is organizing visits to schools by disabled people.

Many communities are having awareness days, or weeks. Funds for these projects are being generated by the communities themselves.

William Thorsteinson is the Ontario Government coordinator for IYDP. "Attention is being focused on government, at all levels, as a result of this year. It's shaking up some of our established thought patterns, and that is good", he says.

"But the real gains are going to be made at the local level. We won't see all of the problems solved, of course. But we certainly will make a start at creating a climate for solutions, to turn around attitudes. Now that's a very significant goal in itself. I think it's a significant year already."

I YDP is Underway

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- **Borough of York**
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407 Canada Trust Building,
Windsor, Ontario

Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped

The Advocacy Resource Centre for the Handicapped (ARCH), on Toronto's Orchard View Boulevard, is the first and only legal clinic in Canada specifically set up to provide direct legal services to disabled people. It was founded in February 1980, and in its first year has dealt with more than a thousand clients.

ARCH is funded by the Ontario Legal Aid Plan to provide direct legal service to disabled people who don't normally have access to lawyers. It is intended, as lawyer David Baker explains, to take cases that are not being dealt with elsewhere. Even so, he and his articulated student assistant have had to turn away more than half the people who have come to them for help.

What are the specific legal problems of disabled people? "Employment is number one", David Baker says. "That is, hassles arising from the ignorance and prejudice of employers in handling disabled workers". He describes a recent case: a person with epilepsy was fired from his job despite four medical reports that his condition was stabilized and should never interfere with his work efficiency. ARCH took the employer to court under the Human Rights Code and got the dismissed worker damages.

Another case is that of a mentally retarded man convicted of a minor offence because he could not grasp the legal concept of 'guilty' or 'not guilty'. ARCH appealed and the conviction was overturned. Then there are the cases of people protesting certification as 'insane' under the Mental Health Act.

The legal issues disabled

people face are endless. Housing is a major problem. ARCH is representing a number of groups in North York petitioning Cabinet regarding zoning bylaws that restrict certain types of group homes.

ARCH employs a Community Legal Worker who is blind. It has a teletype telephone for the hard of hearing in its office. The sign on the door is duplicated in Braille. If clients are in hospital, the ARCH lawyers will make 'house calls'.

ARCH is funded by grants from Ontario Legal Aid, Metro Council, the Federal Government and the various associations for disabled people whose representatives make up the majority of its Board of Directors. A client's eligibility for free legal service is determined by his or her income. ARCH also provides a library that includes Braille and taped materials for blind people as well as legal research and information.

ARCH, as David Baker says, is hoping "the legal profession will eventually put us out of business by providing these services to disabled people as part of normal practice". But that would mean, for example, learning sign language. At present most courts don't provide sign language interpreters.

"Eventually our role should be purely advisory", David Baker says. "But at the moment, we're simply fighting to survive. However, the very last thing disabled people want is a totally segregated legal service. They'd like to be able to go to any lawyer on the list, but that's a very long way off, I'm afraid."

"A sign of our times"

Eaton's has successfully completed its first round of employee classes in sign language for the International Year of Disabled Persons.

Every Thursday evening for five weeks in January and February of this year, 20 employees at the Toronto Eaton Centre were actively engaged in learning how to 'speak' sign language.

The program was initiated by Bonnie McTavish, an employee with Eaton Travel.

"Before the classes were even thought of, I noticed that we were often confronted with a communications barrier when serving customers with a hearing impairment", says Bonnie. "The solution we resorted to was note passing which I felt was awkward and unprofessional".

"With the resources of Ontario Blind-Deaf Services at hand, we were fortunate to obtain experienced sign language instructors to teach an 'in house' course for Eaton's employees in an abbreviated period of time."

The course announcement was made to employees by a leaflet distributed in December with an open invitation to enroll. The response was overwhelming. The first class was immediately oversubscribed with a waiting list for the next.

Ten of the original 20 students have decided to carry on to the next level and another 20 are starting a new beginners class.

even at this early stage.

The motivations for learning sign language are similar to those for learning any language, Bonnie feels. The communications gap that opens up between two people who do not speak the same language is very real. Learning sign language is no different from learning how to speak Italian, Spanish, French or any other language not normally spoken by the student.

It isn't only deaf people who feel awkward about the language barrier. The so-called 'disability' has been as much or more on the part of the 'hearing' sales staff. Deaf customers have learned to overcome the barriers imposed by their hearing impairment.

As Darlene Delfosse, one of the sign language students remarks, "I used to feel so helpless and actually stupid when I was stopped for help by a person who was deaf, despite their efforts to make me feel comfortable".

"I wasn't equipped to handle the situation very well. Now with my limited knowledge of sign language, I'm able to adapt to the situation much better, with a sense of confidence".

Last year, Eaton's also began serving the deaf community with a telephone system (TTY) which sends typed words, not spoken words, with which deaf customers can order goods and services or carry on a

"An investment that more than pays for itself"

Metro Toronto's Internship Program for IYDP is designed to provide work experience for disabled people in a variety of jobs within the municipal government. It is one of three Metro plans for IYDP. The other two programs include a permanent Equal Employment Opportunity Office, in the process of being set up, and a stepped up rehabilitation program for former Metro employees who wish to return to work. Metro is planning to spend a million dollars on these programs.

This will also finance renovations to make buildings more accessible to disabled people, and adaptation for job equipment, where necessary. "The response has been immediate and overwhelming," says Mrs. Belinda Morin, the Metro coordinator of services for elderly and disabled persons. Metro has had calls from hundreds of disabled people who have never even been granted a job interview.

The quality of most of the internship applications has been excellent. An example is

an MBA graduate with cerebral palsy who has never had the chance to work. Another instance is an applicant who is a fully qualified nutritionist who happens to be blind.

Metro's personnel office is matching applications to the city's needs. Disabled people will be appointed to positions very soon now. The goal is that every department will participate in the Internship Program. "We hope this enthusiasm will spread to the private sector," says Mrs. Morin.

Re-employing former workers who have been disabled will be a net saving to Metro's taxpayers. These employees will come off Workmen's Compensation. Metro's new Equal Employment Opportunity Office will be charged with making recommendations to Council to remove barriers to the employment of disabled people, and will advise on technical aids.

"These programs have more than paid for themselves already," Mrs. Morin says. "The ultimate results will exceed our expectations, I'm sure."



Eaton Centre employees learn sign language to improve customer relations.

To learn American Sign Language properly takes about three years. Eaton's employees began with 'finger spelling' which is slow to use but fast to learn. They then proceeded to elementary signs common to store situations.

"Like any language", Bonnie explains, "the more you speak it, the faster you learn".

To encourage the application of what employees are learning, typical store situations are set up in the classrooms. This way employees feel more comfortable in really 'speaking' the language when the need arises.

So far, the practice is already paying off. A rapport between the store staff and deaf customers is gaining some momentum,

'conversation'.

TTY has been slow to catch on. Bonnie believes the fault lies not so much with Eaton's as with the fact that deaf people are reluctant to use the telephone.

Judy Rebick of the Canadian Hearing Society agrees. "They never think of using a telephone themselves. The very idea is such a novelty, TTY has indeed been slow in catching on. But it will".

Editor's Note: Not all deaf people use sign language. Many lip read and in fact, there is some controversy as to the better method in the education of deaf children.

Profile: Ruth Biron "The product is me—Ruth Biron, human being"

"The product you're selling is yourself", Ruth Biron says. "The fact that I am blind is incidental to the fact that I'm an excellent typist with ten years experience".

Ruth smiles and sweeps the straight brown hair from her eyes. She is a slim young woman dressed in a tan cord jacket and plaid skirt. "I usually don't have problems with people once they know me", she murmurs. "No problems at all".

On Ruth's desk at a downtown Toronto lawyer's office is an IBM typewriter, an Optacon reading machine—a device the size of a cassette recorder that converts print into tactile impulses that can be "read" by a fingertip—and a Braille. Her golden retriever seeing-eye dog Halo is curled patiently in the corner.

"Of course", Ruth adds briskly. "It's up to me to come up with positive answers in any situation. Sighted people are apprehensive of the blind. I have to recognize that, and reassure them. I have to put myself in their place, imagine their very natural fears, calm and soothe".

She smiles at the irony of this. "In an office an employer is going to be worried that I'll be able to get about the place without bumping into things. He'll fret that I can manage to travel to work on my own, that I can handle the job. Mostly, sighted people are more worried about my safety and comfort than I ever am".

She laughs. "God, the excuses people give when I'm applying for a job and they find out I'm blind! Suddenly there are a hundred other applicants, or they dither about 'unsuitability', or something. One poor woman I was speaking to on the phone in answer to an ad had her secretary tell me she'd instantly fallen ill with the 'flu'! The woman's embarrassment made her ill".

Ruth shrugs. "I've learned never to tell people over the phone that I can't see. I wait till we're face to face, then I kind of talk them through the interview. If they aren't totally up-tight, they usually forget by the end of the chat that I have a visual impairment".

Ruth has worked at a number of jobs. She has been an instructor at the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), teaching dictating and the use of the Optacon. She's worked in her present office for four months, typing legal documents. Her supervisor, Diane, says succinctly: "The fact that Ruth is blind is totally irrelevant".

This particular office had never employed a disabled person previously. When Ruth came for her interview, Diane was open-minded enough to see that Ruth was a thoroughly capable typist. She was impressed by Ruth's honest admission that, obviously, there were certain tasks she couldn't perform, like copy-typing. Also, it

would be necessary for someone to check her work and correct any errors on the word-processor.

"How very easy it has been", Diane smiles. "We've all learned a lot. As far as the work is concerned, Ruth more than holds her own. But then, Ruth is a highly competent person, blind or sighted. You could see that in the way she learned to find her way about the office in a single day. Halo led her around for one day only. After that, Ruth knew where every door, every desk was placed. Poor Halo, she must be rather bored, now, just sitting in the corner all day long..."

"Yes", Ruth agrees, without false modesty. "I learn fast. And I can take criticism. I always tell people, if I'm doing something wrong, *tell me*. Don't be too embarrassed to correct me, and then be forced to fire me for incompetence!"

Ruth smiles. "But you see, I was fortunate. Though I was

"I judge people from the tones of their speech. Sometimes I make mistakes, as sighted people may when they judge someone by their facial expression. But voices are very revealing".

Her sensitive, pale fingers brush the hair from her eyes. Ruth is constantly alert, ready to respond to and reassure the sighted world. However, she can relax in her apartment where she lives alone, with Halo.

Ruth has lived alone for thirteen years, apart from a year and a half when she was married. Her husband was also blind. But he was, in Ruth's succinct summation, "too dependent".

"He was helpless. Couldn't even make his own dinner if I was late home from the office. Sometimes, too, I wanted to go out with my friends—but he was lost on his own. His trouble was typical of many blind people: he had overprotective parents".

Ruth's friends are both sighted and blind. She goes skiing



"My blindness is incidental."

the street, even if I don't want to go! That's something blind people have to contend with—people who are just too helpful".

A seeing-eye dog is not a leader, Ruth explains. "You have to know where you're going, and give the proper commands. It's a bit like getting into a taxi and giving the driver instructions. He can't take you to your destination unless you can tell him exactly where it is".

Ruth knows a great many blind people cope less well than she does. But she feels it's up to the disabled person to overcome whatever resistance he or she faces.

"I never say, 'I don't know', she says. "I'll talk about my blindness to anyone who cares to listen, or shut up about it if they just don't want to know. You have to be able to read responses, just as anyone does. Being blind just makes you rather more sensitive to the nuances of personal interaction. Blind people use their senses of hearing and touch more than sighted people to 'read' the world".

At the CNIB Ruth has conducted sensory awareness classes. She teaches people to listen to birds, to a waterfall, to touch green grass, to smell flowers. "There's nothing precious about this, it's just useful. And it sensitizes you to a lot of subtleties sighted people might miss because their eyes are so busy".

"I use other people's eyes", Ruth says cheerfully. "If I have a coffee stain on my skirt, I ask people to tell me. I'm a very neat person and would hate to look a mess. I don't want people to indulge me because I can't see".

The longest job Ruth has had lasted four years. She moved on simply to improve herself. She knows that many employers might be too embarrassed to fire a blind worker, but that upsets her.

"If the blind want equality, as many of them claim, they have to take their lumps like anyone else. If they're useless, give 'em the boot, I say!"

Ruth grins abruptly. "But then, as one boss said, 'You're a hard woman, Miss Biron'". Ruth sobers. "But I always remember—the product I'm selling is me". She juts her jaw in challenge. "Just me—Ruth Biron, human being".



"I don't want people to indulge me because I can't see."

blind from birth—the only one in my large family—I was never treated as if I were helpless. My brothers bullied me just like they did my sisters. My parents allowed me to fall off a bike just like the others, till I learned to ride".

Ruth was born in Chicago. She was a premature baby and the hospital kept her too long in the incubator. As a result, the tissues of her corneas were scorched. The condition is named Retrolental Fibroplasia, or RLF.

"Until I was three, I thought no one could 'see'", Ruth says. "Gradually, I began to understand, by listening to other kids chattering, that they had an experience I could never have. I could see shadows, as a child, but no colours. I went to an ordinary school for the first eight years, with remedial lessons in Braille. It was only in high school that I was with other blind people".

Ruth is well aware that she lacks that rich vocabulary of images most people have in their memories. "I don't see things when I dream", she says. "So words are very important to me. They're vital for two reasons. One—they're my way of grappling with the outside world. Two—they give shape and order to the ideas in my head. So voices are crucial..."

with them, canoeing and curling. She belongs to a drama group. "But I'm not clubby", she adds, pulling a face. "I don't like to be jolly in a group. I'm very choosy in my friends. Much of the time we just sit around in my kitchen and jabber".

Her apartment is light and airy. Framed prints decorate the walls. The furniture is cheerfully modern. Ruth is an excellent cook. It's easy to forget that she can't see as she bustles about preparing dinner for a couple of guests. Halo, as usual, is curled up in a corner.

It is a surprise to learn that Ruth only got a seeing-eye dog six months ago, for the very first time. "A dog is a great responsibility", she explains. "It has to be fed, groomed, given its daily obedience training. I suppose I wasn't really ready for that responsibility before..."

"But now Halo really adds to my mobility. I can get about so much faster and more easily. There's less danger of falling into manholes. And in the snow, where traffic sounds are muted, it's hard to judge where the cars are. Halo is a real Godsend".

At the mention of her name, the retriever thumps her tail on the carpet. "Trouble is", Ruth adds, "Everyone wants to pet her, she's so pretty and so friendly. Sometimes people just grab the harness and take me across

"They're among my best people"

"Whatever a disabled person does is just that much more carefully carried out," says Ed Abrams, Chairman of Rembrandt Jewellers Limited, in Scarborough, Ontario, who has employed disabled people for more than fifteen years. "They're among my best people."

Rembrandt Jewellers employs between 200 and 300 people in a very modern plant. A bank of lush greenery under a long skylight divides the open-plan office area from the workspace where many heads are bent over trays of rings and bracelets. At any one time there might be a dozen workers in wheelchairs busy in those cubicles assembling jewellery.

"They're 10% to 25% better at their work than the non-disabled," Ed Abrams states. "They're so glad to get the chance, and don't fool around. They're quicker to train, and the turnover is so much lower than the average. Given the choice, I'd pick a disabled worker over any other, any day. And that's not patronage, it's a fact of experience."

Ed Abrams began to employ disabled people after he had injured his own back in 1963. For six months or so there was a 50% chance that he might never walk again. He was fortunate—he recovered fully. But although he used a wheelchair,

he started to think about the many jobs he could perform.

"All a man needs to make jewellery is good hands and eyes. He's sitting down all day anyway. It's just a matter of training, as with anyone, able or disabled."

Most of the workers Rembrandt employs were disabled as a result of some on-the-job mishap when they were able-bodied. Robert, for instance, who has been with Rembrandt for fourteen years, was working in a lumber yard when a slab of timber fell and crushed his spine, paralysing his legs. He was in his early twenties at the time with a young family.

The Workmen's Compensation Board pays for injured workers' retraining. After a WCB official has assessed the particular job offered, and selects a suitable claimant, the Board finances a trial work period of one month. If, at the end of that month, Rembrandt and the employees like one another, they mutually agree to continue training.

The Board will pay a proportion of the trainees' wages for up to a year. Rembrandt's investment is the cost of instruction, as it is with any unskilled person they might hire. The company's experience has been that the disabled people learn more quickly than most trainees, and



"Disabled workers are excellent," says Ed Abrams, president of Rembrandt Jewellers.

stay a lot longer after they have been trained. "And they turn up to work, come hell or high water. In the worst snowstorm, they'll be here on time," the foreman says.

Ironically, absenteeism is very much less among disabled persons. And as a result of hiring disabled workers, the claims against the Workmen's Compensation are that much lower.

"Many companies fear their compensation rate assessments will soar if they hire disabled workers," Ed Abrams says. "It's probably the greatest single deterrent in the minds of potential employers. My experience is absolutely the opposite. Disabled people abuse the Workmen's Compensation very much less than the others. My rates have never, in fifteen years, been increased on their account."

When he addresses seminars of businessmen, Ed Abrams stresses this point. Though he is certainly not in favour of coercing companies into hiring disabled people by making it a condition of their obtaining government contracts, he does feel a great deal more information and education is necessary. "An awful lot could be done to help people with disabilities," he says. "You have to overcome a certain natural resistance on the part of the working world."

Apart from hiring disabled people, Rembrandt also sponsors the annual Christmas Party of the Scarborough Disability Club. Two hundred people are invited. Celebrities from the world of politics and entertainment come along to meet the members. "We have a terrific time," says one of the secretaries at Rembrandt.

Ed Abrams invites businessmen of his acquaintance to the party. The effect is often dramatic. Busy executives stay all evening; they are so delighted with the gaiety of the occasion. "You only have to get an employer involved with one disabled person, get him to experience the marvellous spirit they have, and the man is hooked."

What are the fears an employer might have about hiring disabled workers?

Ed Abrams answers them all. "Work disruption? None. Disabled people require no extra first aid. They have, if anything, fewer industrial accidents. We've never had any real bother."

One of Rembrandt's employees won the shot-put and javelin throw in the Disabled Olympics. "Don't ever baby them," Ed Abrams says firmly. "The

good ones hate it. It doesn't help their self-respect."

Are special facilities needed for disabled people? Rembrandt has wide doorways and toilet cubicles for workers using wheelchairs. The extra cost of this was borne by the Workmen's Compensation Board. "The Workmen's Compensation are extremely cooperative," Ed Abrams says.

If there is one real problem regarding the hiring of disabled people, it is to do with transportation, but that is not the fault of the worker.

"Getting people to and from work is the problem," Ed Abrams states emphatically. He feels that transportation for disabled people is just not adequate. "I know it must be quite difficult to organize all these individual pickups, but it must be done. Some of our workers come from as far away as Oshawa and Mississauga."

Many disabled workers drive in cars fitted with special hand controls. They can get a rebate of the 10 per cent federal excise tax on gasoline, a sales tax rebate on the purchase of a car, but no tax write-off for the actual cost of the vehicle and its maintenance. Ed Abrams thinks this should be changed, since a car is often a necessity of employment for a disabled person.

What also should be changed, Ed Abrams feels, are the facilities for training disabled students in vocational colleges. Rembrandt has to train someone from scratch; it would help if the prospective employee were given some preliminary instruction before starting at the workbench.

When Ed Abrams looks back over his fifteen years experience in employing disabled workers, one small incident sums up the self-respect a disabled person gains by doing a real job. Robert, Rembrandt's longest-employed disabled man, once said to his boss: "I can sleep at night. I've done an honest day's work for an honest day's pay. I am happily tired."

"Think about what that simple statement means..." the Chairman of Rembrandt comments.

On the Chairman's office wall is a presentation plaque from the Scarborough Disability Club. The dedication reads: "To Ed Abrams, a man gifted with a big heart."

"Listen," he says quickly, to cover his modesty, "I am running a business here, not a charity. I employ disabled workers because they're among my best people—that's all."



"I'd pick a disabled worker over any other."

Face-to-Face

The real worth of IYDP will be measured by a change in attitude about disabilities and disabled people. Attitudes based on misinformation or unfounded fear will only change if people are aware of how they think and feel. Becoming more aware of other points of view, helps open the doors to understanding that have been closed too long.

In our research on attitudes, we talked with able-bodied people (including employers), disabled people themselves, and their friends and families. These discussions have provided insights into not only common fears, misconceptions and sensitivities, but also aspirations. We want to share some of the comments with you. We believe that an awareness of sensitivities and aspirations will open up the dialogue that will lead to a new understanding.

The United Nations has declared 1981 as the International Year of Disabled Persons. What does this mean to you and what do you think it will accomplish?

"I think everybody has got to learn that everyone is a human being and we've all got our own problems, and when it really comes down to it there's not really much difference between one person and the next despite any obvious physical differences."

"I think it's probably a public relations ploy and at the end of the year, it'll be gone and who cares—it's an invisible minority."

"It's something that I haven't thought a great deal about."

"I would like more employment this year... like to be able to squeeze myself in somewhere."

"I would like to see the public see us as we are and not be afraid."

What are your feelings about disabled people and are these attitudes a help or a hindrance in your relationship to them as individuals?

"I've met quite a few handicapped people and they truly are the same as anybody else. There are obnoxious ones and there are delightful ones, uninformed and informed."

"Some of us aren't around them enough. The only time I ever see anybody usually is on the subway and you don't know how the person is going to react... I don't really know anybody that's handicapped personally."

"It's something you don't think about unless you have a friend or someone in the family, unless it directly affects your life."

"It reminds me that it could happen to anybody when you see somebody in a wheelchair... that's what scares me."

"There's a much deeper prejudice... subconscious fear of the illness of the person."

"I think people feel scared to say the wrong thing..."

"It's depressing—you feel sorry for them."

"People are conditioned from day one that those kind of people are supposed to be



"We've got to get out and assert ourselves as equals."

shut away on government assistance."

"You don't want to share your happiness because you know they may want to do the same thing, but they're not able to... it makes them bitter maybe..."

How do non-disabled people perceive your disability, and does this alter their response to you as a person?

"I find most people are pretty helpful really, pulling open doors or holding the elevator. Of course, their first reaction is to ask me about the wheelchair itself, in some way, but at least this cracks the ice."

"When it comes to kids, they are fascinated by the wheelchair. They usually say, 'Hey, can I have a ride.'"

"I'm not ashamed of my wheelchair, but I'm careful not to embarrass the person who is not in it... I like to be subtle about it."

"If someone tells me I've got to leave my eyes outside, I don't appreciate that at all... I think I have a right to use anything that makes me more independent. I feel like my dog is a part of my body."

"I wish people would realize that if I don't hear them the first time it's not because I'm stupid."

"Society views us as imperfect people."

What do you think disabled people themselves can do to further the goals of IYDP?

"It's necessary for people to be out in the mainstream of society... I don't like the whole idea of handouts. We've got to go out and assert ourselves as equals."

"...in order to make the exposure happen, handicapped people need to be together—unified—they also need to start speaking up... we need to be involved in making decisions so we can become better in making decisions."

"The year of the handicapped can be good as long as the

handicapped take part in it, as long as the handicapped are involved in public education... we want to be treated like citizens."

As an employer, what are your attitudes towards hiring disabled people? What kind of job performance do you expect from a disabled employee?

"We've been trying to hire a disabled person; we're having trouble getting a disabled person to apply."

"I think we could all use more information about what disabled people can do."

"Your first reaction can be wrong in a sense that you feel a handicap may limit his or her ability to do a specific job—you might not give them a chance to prove they can because of that."

"...with a little bit of creativity you can turn a job and restructure things so that a disabled person can do all sorts of things... from the mundane to the fairly sophisticated."

"Because of our preconceived ideas about disabled people we monitor them in a special way to see how they perform, rather than get rid of our preconceived ideas and take whoever comes through the door if they are qualified for the job."

"We have a tight organization, and we're not prepared to carry people. If the people can do the job and they're handicapped, that's just fine."

"I've got a business and when I can, when it's feasible, I will hire a handicapped person whether it's for the most simple task or the most complex computer operation."

"We've been conditioned from day one that handicapped people can't do anything, period."

What changes must be made to help disabled people achieve a more equal status in the world at large?

"Not only the right to make decisions, we've got to have the right to make mistakes"

"We have to educate most of

the employers because this is where the fault lies; they won't have a handicapped person."

"Employers have to really listen and let our qualifications, our attitudes and motivation be the factor for judgment rather than the fact that we have a physical handicap."

"The family has got to treat the handicapped as a regular person and not as special... they've got to be treated as their brothers and sisters."

"Education about the handicapped... has to come into the school system at the elementary level."

"I think that public awareness and re-education of the public is needed because we're now in the streets all over the place... the public, they might feel uncomfortable towards myself or somebody else—I can sense that right away and that's a barrier."

"Whose bad attitude needs changing? Maybe it's on both sides."

IYDP Pins

The Ontario Federation for the Physically Disabled is promoting the sale of 22K gold-plated pins bearing the U.N. insignia for 1981, as part of an ongoing effort to promote the International Year of Disabled Persons. The pins have been produced by Rembrandt Jewellers, a Canadian manufacturer of metal charms, widely known for their employment of disabled workers and support of disability groups. The IYDP pins, produced for the OFPD exclusively at cost, will be available wholesale to disability-related groups as a means for fund-raising. All profits from the sale of these pins will be used by the Ontario Federation and its member groups to publicize the goals of IYDP and continue its program of support services to physically disabled people.

For information about how to obtain your IYDP pins, please contact:

Michael Pring,
Communications Director,
Ontario Federation for the
Physically Handicapped,
90 Thorncliffe Park Drive
Toronto, Ontario
M4H 1M5
Telephone: (416) 425-0501

IYDP Flags

Special IYDP flags are available from All Seasons Display Ltd. in two sizes—36" x 72" and 6" x 10"—at a retail cost of \$29.95 and \$30.00 per dozen respectively, plus \$2.00 for shipping and handling.

All orders should be placed through:

All Seasons Display Ltd.
24 Melham Court, Unit 6
Agingcourt, Ontario
M1B 2T8

Note: Ontario residents, add 7% provincial sales tax.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF DISABLED PERSONS 1981

Communities throughout Ontario have been actively involved in IYDP, hosting all kinds of special events, awareness days, conferences, seminars, workshops and other IYDP-related programs as part of a continuing effort to support the goals of IYDP. The first few months were busy with activities such as CNIB's White Cane Week, the Ontario Association for the Mentally Retarded Educational Conference (co-sponsored by the Ontario Ministry of Education), Operation Horseshoe at Rainbow Bridge, Niagara Falls, and Awareness Days in a number of communities, including Barrie, Cambridge, Guelph and the Region of Peel.

Other events are planned for the coming months and will be highlighted in this column. We'd like to hear about your future IYDP initiatives—please drop us a line!

MAY

Awareness Month—Scarborough Action Committee Throughout Metro Toronto

- Apr 26- Handicapped Awareness Week
May 3 Region of Peel
- Apr 30- Ability Awareness Week
May 9 Downtown & John Galt Mall, Cambridge
- 2 Awareness Day
Burlington Mall, Burlington
- 8-10 Bolton Education Workshop
Centre—Special Education Workshop
Bolton
- 10-14 16th Annual Conference of Association for the Care of Children's Health
"Links in the Chain"—Hospital for Sick Children
Royal York, Toronto
- 11 Seminar—"PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES" (New Life in your Congregation)
St. Paul's University Ottawa
Ongwanada Hospital, Kingston
- 12 Seminar—"PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES" (New Life in your Congregation)
Ontario Bible College, Toronto
- 13 Seminar—"PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES" (New Life in your Congregation)
St. David's United Church, Woodstock

- 13 Seminar on the employment of disabled persons
9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
Council Chamber, City Hall, Toronto
- 13-16 Ontario Association for the Mentally Retarded Annual Meeting and Conference
"It is time to turn it all around"
Windsor
- 14-15 Disability Related Issues Conference—including Access, Education, Employer Awareness and Recreation and Leisure Sponsored by All Disabled Are People Too (ADAPT)
Loyalist College, Belleville
- 16-17 Regional Games for the Physically Disabled
Peterborough and Belleville
- 21 "Tactics for Community Organization" BOOST Seminar
Rotary-Laughlin Centre, Toronto
- 21-24 Shrine Circus presented by Toronto Ramessie Shriners
Inviting needy or disabled children—opening night show free of charge
CNE Coliseum, Toronto
- 22-24 Regional Games for the Physically Disabled
London
- 29-31 Regional Games for the Physically Disabled
Englehart

JUNE

- 4-5 Canadian Rehabilitation Council for the Disabled Annual meeting
Toronto
- 11 Ability Centre opening
Hamilton
- 11-12 Workshop Under Attack Conference sponsored by The Ontario Rehabilitation Workshop Committee
Toronto
- 13-14 ACCESS SUNDAY—in churches of all faiths that are affiliated with "Caring Congregations"
- 23- Disabled Artists Major Art Exhibition
MacDonald Gallery, Queen's Park
Toronto
- 25 "Human Rights Legislation" BOOST SEMINAR
Rotary-Laughlin Centre, Toronto
- 27 Driving Roadeo for Disabled Persons
Sponsored by Easter Seal Society, Toronto

JULY

- 9-12 Ontario Games for the Physically Disabled
Burlington

Easter Seal Society announces poster contest winners

The winners of the Easter Seal Society Poster Contest on behalf of the International Year of Disabled Persons were announced recently. Eight year

old Heather Williams of Maxville Public School, Maxville, Ontario, won in her age category (8 and under) for her poster entitled 'The Disabled are Able'.

The winner in the 9 to 13 age group was Becky Fleett, 11, of Hillcrest Central School in Teeswater, Ontario, for her 'Be-a-ware Capability Sits Here' poster. Walter Ploegman, 17, of Belleville Collegiate Institute, Belleville, Ontario, won in the

14 and older category for his poster entitled 'Determination'.

The winners in the three age categories are each awarded \$81 in dollar coins; the 9 winners of Honourable Mentions receive special certificates.

Winning posters in the Easter Seal contest.



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Comments

If you know of any other news-worthy programs, services or projects for or by disabled persons that are being developed—government and non-government—that others would find interesting to read about, please feel free to submit them for possible inclusion in the next issue of "Momentum", by May 29, 1981. Due to limited printing space, we will be giving priority to early submissions.

Please mail your contributions to:

Focus '81
IYDP
P.O. Box 30
Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A2

Input

We invite you to comment on the editorial content of this issue and suggest ways in which we may improve the editorial quality and coverage.





Oxford



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